

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 00687 301459Z

42

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R 301425Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5449

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0687

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICS--FREE CENTER PARTY (LIKUD) SPLITS

1. SUMMARY: FREE CENTER PARTY'S FOUR-MAN KNESSET REPRESENTATION WITHIN THE LIKUD SPLIT ON JAN 28 FOLLOWING SEVERAL MONTHS OF INTENSE QUARRELS OVER "IDEOLOGICAL" AS WELL AS PERSONAL ISSUES. FREE CENTER MK'S ELIEZER SHOSTAK AND EHUD OLMERT NOTIFIED PARTY LEADER SHMUEL TAMIR THAT THEY HAD DECIDED TO FORM SEPARATE FACTION WITHIN LIKUD. END SUMMARY.

2. SPLIT DID NOT COME AS SURPRISE TO MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS, WHO HAD FOLLOWED PROGRESSIVE DETERIORATION WITHIN PARTY OVER LAST SEVERAL MONTHS. ON IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL, SHOSTAK AND OLMERT CHARGED TAMIR WITH ADOPTING "A DOVISH LINE" IN FAVOR OF TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE RE WEST BANK AS WELL AS OTHER OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. TAMIR, ON OTHER HAND, CLAIMS THAT FREE CENTER HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRAGMATIC PARTY AND CONTENDED THAT HIS VIEW ON TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE AND PEACE WERE SHARED NOT ONLY BY MAJORITY OF FREE CENTER MEMBERS BUT ALSO BY MAJORITY OF LIKUD VOTERS. HE HAS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 00687 301459Z

COUNTER-ATTACKED BY CHARGING THAT VIEWS OF SHOSTAK AND

OLMERT WERE IDENTICAL WITH THOSE OF HERUT.

3. LATEST SPLIT, FOLLOWING ON HEELS OF RESIGNATION FROM HERUT BY MK BENJAMIN HALEVI (TEL AVIV A-009, PAGE 9) UNDERSCORES GROWING PRESSURES WITHIN LIKUD ON BASICS FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY QUESTIONS, AND PARTICULARLY ON APPROACH TO ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS, STATUS OF DISSIDENT ELEMENTS IS COMPLICATED BY FACT THAT LIKUD'S BASIC AGREEMENT FORBIDS ITS KNESSET MEMBERS FROM MOVING FROM ONE TO ANOTHER FACTION, WE BELIEVE THAT SHOSTAK AND OLMERT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE JOINED HERUT IF THEY WERE ALLOWED TO DO SO, AND CONCEIVABLY HALVEI WOULD HAVE AFFILIATED HIMSELF WITH FREE CENTER.

4. COMMENT: SHMUEL TAMIR, WHO FORMED THE FREE CENTER IN 1968, IS KNOWN TO BE AT ODDS WITH HERUT LEADER MENAHEM BEGIN, GOING BACK TO THE MID-SIXTIES. AT THAT TIME, BEGIN HAD FORCED TAMIR, WHO REPRESENTED A CHALLENGE TO HIS DOMINANCE, OUT OF HERUT. IN OUR JUDGMENT, TAMIR STILL CANNOT BE DESCRIBED AS A MODERATE ON TERRITORIAL QUESTIONS, DESPITE HIS ADVOCACY OF TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE IN RETURN FOR REAL PEACE. IT IS HARD TO PREDICT AT THIS STAGE WHAT TAMIR INTENDS TO DO NOW THAT HE HAS BEEN REDUCED TO LEADER OF A MINISCULE FACTION. HIS NEW-FOUND MODERATION HAS BEEN BASED IN PART ON HIS ASPIRATION TO CONVINCE RABIN OF VALIDITY OF MOVING TO A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, GIVEN RABIN'S FIRM REFUSAL TO GO TO A UNITY GOVERNMENT, TAMIR FOR NOW SEEMS TO BE IN A BIND. LABOR PARTY LEADERS DOUBTLESS WOULD HAVE DERIVED GREATER SATISFACTION FROM FREE CENTER SPLIT IF IT HAD NOT COINCIDED WITH INFORMATION MINISTER YARIV'S RESIGNATION (TEL AVIV 0632).
VELIOTES

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